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The “Secret” Power Behind Mission: The Name of Jesus

One of the most essential questions in missiology is: How can the church, while faithfully engaging in God’s mission, communicate the gospel effectively?¹ Paul Hiebert, a leading missiological anthropologist of the 20th century, suggested a practical way of posing the same question: “Could someone become a Christian after hearing the gospel only once?” (2008:10). Hiebert suggests that the answer can only be yes. However, the issue of genuine conversion cannot be dismissed so fast in the face of current concerns about “cheap grace,” syncretism, dual allegiance, and nominal Christianity, to name a few concerns of the church around the globe.

In the last 20 years, mission studies have broadened the understanding of the relation between worldview and discipleship. In *Transforming Worldviews*, Hiebert argues that the goal of conversion to Christianity includes more than transmission of knowledge and changes in behavior and rituals. It must encompass a transformation at all three levels: behavior, beliefs, and worldview.² “If the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the gospel is subverted and the result is a syncretistic Christopaganism, which has the form of Christianity but not its essence” (Hiebert 2008:11).

Three Encounters

Another major participant in this discussion is Charles Kraft, long-time professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, who has defined worldview as “the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments/alliances underlying a people’s perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions” (1996:52).

In 1991 and 1992 Kraft published articles³ dealing with worldview transformation through three encounters that are crucial to the experience and communication of the gospel—allegiance (or commitment), truth,

and power encounters—which are related to the important dimensions of Christian experience and witness—relationship, understanding, and freedom (Kraft 1996:453).

Each encounter functions as the “appropriate antidote” for elements of a particular kind of spiritual struggle (Kraft 2005:100). Although distinct, they work in conjunction with each other. Truth (or knowledge) solves the problem of ignorance (or error); allegiance (or commitment) to Jesus replaces any other previous commitment; and, power protects from and provides victory over the enemy.

To illustrate this model, Kraft cites the original discipleship experience between Jesus and the Twelve, in which they were called to have an experience (allegiance) accompanied by content (truth) in order to engage in mission (power).

Truth Encounter

Traditionally, missiological approaches have emphasized the cognitive aspect of the Christian experience (Hiebert 2008:50).⁴ There are a number of concepts that one is expected to study and know in order to make a decision and become a disciple of Christ. Because of the culture of modernity, conversion has been “defined primarily in terms of affirming a particular set of doctrines (orthodoxy) or practices (orthopraxy)” (Hiebert 2008:195). Kraft notes that “our bibliographies show that most of our [contextualization] studies have focused on the important *cognitive* and *structural* dimensions” (2005:99).

Kraft believes this is the dimension most familiar to people.⁵ Ultimately, then, a question arises: To what extent does new information automatically affect one’s worldview? To what extent does new information automatically lead to one’s discipleship into Christian maturity?

Allegiance Encounter

The Allegiance/Commitment dimension emphasizes the relationship experience. James 2:19 (“even the demons believe—and shudder,” NRSV) is used by Kraft to show that the religious experience must grow beyond mere intellectual knowledge. He believes allegiance is the most important of the three dimensions (2005:106).

According to Kraft, “The initial commitment to Christ brings us into a primary relationship with Him in replacement of the primacy of relationships with other gods, spirits, people, material objects, organizations, or whatever. Subsequent commitments confirm and deepen that relationship” (1996:453).

Power Encounter

The third dimension, power-freedom, is related to the ministry of those who know and are committed to Jesus. It has to do with Jesus' works of power and of love as promised in John 14:12 NRSV, "the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these." In practice a power encounter⁶ refers to events in which God's power is shown to be greater than other gods.

Jesus worked in the power of the Holy Spirit while He was on earth (1) to set people free from captivity to the enemy as evidenced by sickness, lameness, blindness, and demonization among other things; (2) to set an example for his followers of the things they should do; and (3) to introduce His disciples to the power that would continue working in them as they nurtured their relationship with God and sought to be holy. As Kraft observes, "In conjunction with the teaching of truth and the appeal for allegiance, He regularly freed people from the enemy's captivity through His use of God's power" (1996:452).

This important part of mission has been almost completely neglected in the West. Kraft analyzes it by saying that "though Pentecostal and charismatic witnesses have done better, evangelicals have stressed allegiance and truth but have been deficient in the power dimension of the biblical message." One of the biggest resulting problems of this is dual allegiance (1996:453).⁷

The illuminating and challenging aspects of Kraft's three encounters model seem to lie on its holistic emphasis. One could rightfully point out that different movement/expressions of Christianity have failed by under or over emphasizing one of these three aspects of discipleship. Kraft clarifies in *Appropriate Christianity* that his "plea is for balance, a balance that goes three ways" (2005:102).

Acts 4

Although Kraft and Tippett have used Moses and Pharaoh (Exod 5-12), Elijah and the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18), and the ministry of Jesus as examples of this holistic model of conversion, it would be helpful also to consider Acts 4 within that framework. Verse 12 ("There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved," NRSV) is the classic text for the discussion about the different nuances under the general categories of Inclusivism, Exclusivism, and Pluralism.⁸ I would like to suggest, however, that verse 7 ("When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?'" NRSV) and verse 10 ("Let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this

man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead," NRSV) are instrumental to understanding verse 12, especially in connection with the word "name."

The chapter begins with a description of the context that led Peter and John before the Sanhedrin. Verse 2 emphasizes that the reason for the disturbance was a truth encounter made evident while "the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (Hendriksen and Kistemaker 1953:147). Many believed and joined the believers—an allegiance encounter. Then, Peter and John were seized and brought before the Sanhedrin.

The Question

The next day when they were brought before the Sanhedrin the Bible describes that the first question emphasized the power encounter aspect: "By what *power* or what name did you do this?" Theologians express different positions on the actual intent of this question. John B. Polhill opines that "some interpreters assume that the question has to do with the man's healing, but the main reason for the arrest had been the preaching of the apostles (v. 2)" (2001:142). After all, do they want to know the power or name used for *the preaching or the healing*?⁹

Chronologically, it seems that the antecedent of "this" in verse 7 is the teaching and proclamation on the previous day.¹⁰ Although the apostles' preaching triggered their imprisonment, Peter understands their context well enough to know that the members of the Sanhedrin could not accept the miracle performed earlier (Hendricksen and Kistemaker 1953:153). Luke describes Peter as "filled by the Holy Spirit." Peter decides to talk about the healing—an idea reinforced at the end by his answer in verse 10. Therefore, applying Kraft's model, I suggest that both encounters—the power encounter when the crippled man was healed and the truth encounter through the preaching of Peter—are, in reality, part of the same mission experience.

The Name of Jesus

A correct understanding of the name of Jesus in Acts 4 also supports the holistic view of the mission experience. "The 'name of Jesus' is a frequent phrase in Acts.¹¹ It should be borne in mind that in Hebrew 'name' often does not "mean a definite appellation but denotes office, rank, dignity. . . . In Acts the 'name of Jesus' comprehends the idea of His person, power, and dignity as acknowledged to be Messiah and Lord; it sums up the cause which the Apostles advocated" (Page 1886:98).

Three observations about verse 7 are relevant to this discussion:

(1) contrary to the observation made by Kistemaker and Hendriksen that "the rulers want to know the source of the apostles' power for performing a miracle *and* they want to learn the name of the person who endowed the apostles with this power (italics added)" (Hendricksen and Kistemaker 1953:151-152), the Bible suggests interchangeability between "power" and "name;" (2) the question mentions a power or a name as if they were using a magical formula as exorcists practiced (Acts 19:13) in order to catch them by Scripture (Deut 13:1; Robertson 1997: see Acts 4:7); and (3) they are concerned about their authorization to heal and preach about the resurrection. The overall undergirding issue in the question in verse 7 seems to be their powerful authority—which Jesus gave them.

In Acts 4:8 Peter is given another opportunity to rely on Jesus' authority and now boldly explains before the Sanhedrin about God's plan of Salvation through Jesus, the Messiah. Peter's answer is found in Acts 4:10. He said: "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that his man stands before you healed."

The universal statement about salvation is found in verse 12. "Peter challenges his immediate audience but at the same time speaks to all people who seek salvation" (Hendricksen and Kistemaker 1953:155). Close attention to the original language in this verse widens one's understanding about the name of Jesus. "The crux of the sermon is a play on the Greek word *sōzō*, which means both physical 'salvation' in the sense of healing (v. 9) as well as the spiritual, eschatological sense of salvation (v. 12)" (Polhill 2001:143). Of course, there is no magical power in the name—the word "Jesus" as a magical spell—but there is power in true divine *dunamis* available to all who claim it through Jesus. To save and to heal are both part of one experience (155). Polhill observes that "the physical 'salvation' of the lame man through the name of Jesus is thus a pointer to the far greater salvation that comes to all who call upon his name in faith" (2001:143), but I would suggest that that is a pointer to the whole of the experience of salvation that includes salvation/healing of the whole.

The crowd in the temple wondered about the source of the lame man's healing, and Peter pointed to the name of Jesus. The Sanhedrin wanted to know about the name, and Peter pointed them to the healing of the lame man. The two go together: wholeness, salvation in the name of Jesus; the name of Jesus brings wholeness. Peter's words contain a bit of irony. The rulers were worried about the political dangers of the "name" the apostles were preaching. "This name is not destructive," said Peter, "it brings good things; it brings wholeness" (author's paraphrase; Polhill 2001:143-144).

Still, Polhill notices that Peter reaches the highest level of revelation in the end of his answer when he talks not about the power/name, but

the person. He makes a direct appeal to the Sanhedrin in the first person plural (2001:143-144). Peter resorts not to an overstatement but rather to a descriptive idiom when he says that there is no other name under heaven than the name *Jesus*. Nowhere in the entire world is anyone able to find another name (i.e., person) that offers the salvation Jesus provides (Hendricksen and Kistemaker 1953:155). They asked for the name in whom his authority rested. He answered their question. It was the name, the power of Jesus (Polhill 2001:144). It was Jesus Himself. As Ellen G. White says, "Jesus only"—in these words is contained the secret of the life and power that marked the history of the early church" (White 1911:64).

A note should be made about another truth encounter in Peter's answer. "How easy it would have been for Peter and John to answer the high priest's question by simply saying, "God did it." That would have been a theologically, religiously, and politically correct response, and the apostles could have been dismissed immediately" (Gangel 1998:60). Instead they used the moment for a thorough explanation of the truth.

If one does not look any closer, it seems there is no allegiance encounter in this story—the third dimension in Kraft's model. All of Peter's sermons to this point ended with an appeal, but there seems to be none here. As a characteristic of Peter's sermons, an implicit appeal is found in verse 12. If there is salvation in no other name, then obviously one must make a commitment to that sole name that brings salvation. But the appeal is even stronger than that. Peter switched to the first person at the end of the verse, "by which we must be saved," amounting to a direct appeal to the Sanhedrin.

Two other observations found in Acts 4 allude to an allegiance encounter: The Sanhedrin's realization that "these men had been with Jesus" (v. 13) and the presence of the "man who had been healed standing there with them" (v. 14). They see the evidence of physical healing in the man who used to be a cripple. But they must understand that spiritual well-being includes forgiveness of sin and a restored relationship with God (Hendricksen and Kistemaker 1953:155).

In summary, I suggest that in the discussion about the need to hear the actual name of Jesus in order to be saved, emphasis should also be given to the power component of the conversion experience as found in Acts 4. Although Peter is talking about one concept, he appears to move from the idea of power (v. 7) to name (v. 10) to person (v. 12). Kraft's model seems to follow this highlighting of the importance of a holistic understanding of mission. The truth encounter with knowledge about Jesus should not be disassociated from a power encounter with God's authority leading to an allegiance encounter.

Implications

This combination of Bible exegesis and missiological insights should corroborate to inform a mission that is true and revelant. Mission, as seen in Acts 4, needs to be considered in a holistic way. One suggested approach is Kraft’s three encounters model including a truth, a power, and an allegiance encounter. In this last section, four major subjects are briefly explored in connection with the implications of the current discussion and thought-provoking questions are included in order to spark the development of relevant applications.

Biblical Holistic Mission

Although a perfectly balanced missiological approach employed by human beings would only be possible through God’s grace, one should seek a holistic approach to avoid common pitfalls. According to Kraft’s assessment “much of the world’s Christianity is anemic because it was not presented with such exercise of divine power as a part of it” (Kraft 1996:452). He criticizes the fact that many evangelicals know “virtually nothing of the spiritual power dimension of Christianity” and, in some circles, “there is a tendency to degrade or ignore the experiential, relationship dimension as well” (Kraft 2005:101).

The beginning of this paper briefly mentioned the overemphasis on intellectual knowledge (this is possibly the most common imbalance seen in the Adventist Church). Among the consequences of this approach one will find abstract faith, nominal Christianity, dual allegiance, and lack of true fellowship. Imbalance could be found in the other two dimensions of this model as well. An overemphasis on an allegiance encounter could result in a shallow, syncretistic, “club” Christianity. An overemphasis on power encounter is not healthy either since it can produce an ecstatic, miracle-dependent, and over emotional Christianity.

Hopefully, a balanced approach would also help to inform the development of an Adventist soteriology that recognizes the great controversy, does not only emphasize that “there is salvation in no other name” (v. 12), but also, that “no other name has the power of the name of Jesus” (v. 11). Thus, making the inclusivism-exclusivism discussion broad enough to give everyone a chance to not only hear or know about Jesus, but to see and experience Him in order to make a commitment.

Application question: Could a more holistic and balanced approach to mission be part of the explanation for the larger growth of Christianity (and of Adventism, specifically) in the majority world (Africa, Asia, and Latin America)?

Effective Mission

As mentioned in the introduction, the goal of mission is transformation at the worldview level, which includes more than just transmission of knowledge. Kraft points out that modern understanding of knowledge as influenced by Western Enlightenment differs from the scriptural definition that reflects experiential truth, not just intellectual, theoretical truth/knowledge. He suggests that “one of the crucial aspects of Jesus’ method was to enfold His teaching of truth in a relational context—discipleship. He chose twelve people to teach by example in the context of the day-in, day-out activities of living together and ministering to people in love and power” (Kraft 1996:106). This is how Alan Hirsch explains and exemplifies this process.

If our starting point is old thinking and old behaviour in a person or church, and we see it as our task to change that situation, taking the Hellenistic approach will mean that we provide information through books and classrooms, to try and get the person/church to a new way of thinking, and hopefully from there to a new way of acting. The problem is that by merely addressing intellectual aspects of the person, we fail to be able to change behavior. . . . It is genuinely hard to change one’s behaviors by merely getting new ideas, as behaviors are deeply entrenched in us via our ingrained habits, upbringing, cultural norms, erroneous thinking, etc. Even though gaining knowledge is essential to transformation, we soon discover that it’s going to take a whole lot more than new thinking to transform us. Anyone who has struggled with an addiction knows this. (Hirsch 2006:122-123)

The end of the experience of Acts 4 describes the effective testimony of that combination of truth, power, and allegiance. Kistemaker and Hendriksen call it undeniable evidence. The question in verse 7 admits “the reality of the miracle, which afterwards they confess themselves unable to deny (v. 16)” (Jamieson and Fausset 1997; see Acts 4:7). In the end, the undeniable evidence is found both in the miracle and in the lives of the agents of God.

Application question: How could a powerful missiological strategy be formulated to impact people at the worldview level? How does a mass distribution of books fit the general Adventist mission strategy?¹²

Relevancy to World Religions Adherents and Postmoderns

This holistic approach to mission seems to be very relevant when approaching the adherents of the world religions and postmoderns.

Both groups have a worldview that takes considerable interest in the supernatural.

Kraft also believes that "for people like the Hebrews and most of today's peoples, for whom spiritual power is a primary concern, power encounters are often the clearest way to demonstrate the superiority of God over their spirits and gods" (Kraft 1996:452). Although not in the same way, a primary concern in orthopraxy religions (e.g., Islam, Animism, and Hinduism) "is to be able to command enough spiritual power to avoid or correct problems in their lives either caused by the evil powers or hopelessly dealt with through their worldview. When they hear biblical stories demonstrating the power of God, they are often very receptive" (Kraft 1996:453). "Before people from power-oriented cultures will come to Christ, they often must be convinced that he has the power to address these concerns more effectively than their old religious system" (Ott, Strauss, and Tennent 2010:254).

Traditionally, Western missionaries' orientation was less supernatural than the worldview of those they were trying to reach. However, the worldview of the West itself has changed. New Age, Eastern, and animistic thought have invaded the West, even as postmodernity takes hold and emphasizes a search for meaning in life through intuition and subjectivity resulting in many thriving forms of spirituality today (Pocock, Rheenen, and McConnell 2005:197). In their outreach to postmoderns, "missionaries can no longer rely on didactic, cognitive approaches, as if Christianity were a case that could be proven in a court of law or demonstrated by methods suited to the laboratory" (Pocock et al. 2005:107).

Application question: Could many of the obstacles in approaching orthopraxy religions be overcome by having a power encounter as the starting point in mission?

Power of the Holy Spirit

Finally, one should not overlook the powerful operation of the Holy Spirit as the foundational prerequisite for mission.

The correct emphasis on the spiritual power in mission challenges the practical atheism of the secular modern and postmodern age; helps one to focus on the great controversy between God and Satan; and challenges the idea that problems can be reduced to psychological, social, physiological, or circumstantial factors (Ott et al. 2010:240). One ought to remember that "mission does not advance against Satan's kingdom primarily through the right missiological strategies or technique, abundant finances, or advanced education; it advances through the spiritual power that comes through living as transformed kingdom people in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Ott et al. 2010:247).

On the day of Pentecost Peter and the others received the Holy Spirit, who continued to live in them. From then on, the Holy Spirit clearly guided the mission in every aspect: truth, power, and allegiance encounters. Acts 4:8 mentions a filling with the Holy Spirit when Peter spoke before the Sanhedrin (Hendriksen and Kistemaker 1953:152).

Ellen G. White relates this experience with the power of God while commenting on Peter's personal conversion and the importance of that in his ministry.

Those present who remembered the part that Peter had acted at the trial of his Master, flattered themselves that he could now be intimidated by the threat of imprisonment and death. But the Peter who denied Christ in the hour of His greatest need was impulsive and self-confident, differing widely from the Peter who was brought before the Sanhedrin for examination. Since his fall he had been converted. He was no longer proud and boastful, but modest and self-distrustful. *He was filled with the Holy Spirit, and by the help of this power he was resolved to remove the stain of his apostasy by honoring the name he had once disowned.* (1911:63, emphasis added)

“Though the formulation and presentation of the gospel in culturally meaningful terms is a task that deserves our best effort, it has become apparent that God's representatives must go forth in dependence upon prayer and the power of the Spirit, who alone can convince people of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-10) and overcome the Evil One in any situation” (Dockery, Butler, and Church 1992:891).

While there is room for growth in the Adventist understanding of the overall powerful work and demonstration of the Holy Spirit, in mission, a simple first step toward a more effective presentation of the Gospel would include witnessing God's power in the missionary's life—the very demonstration of how God's power has transformed and led the efforts of one who was called to dedicate their lives to share the Gospel. Every missionary should be quick to acknowledge the clear and the unclear instances in which God's power protected them and opened doors for mission in whatever context they are in—to acknowledge that God's power is in operation before people can understand enough to pledge allegiance to Christ. After all, that is the power that enables one to grow stronger in their commitment to Christ, their knowledge of His truth, and enables them to minister to others the truth that leads to Christian commitment (Kraft 1996:110).

Application question: How can an awareness of one's need for God's power transform a person into one who is dependent on the Holy Spirit for every aspect of mission? Has the fear of introducing the very Power

that makes mission possible turned the power of God into the “secret” power behind mission?

Notes

¹While one might think that the purpose of missions is self-evident, a closer look at that discussion will show a plurality of understandings and emphases. Despite the differences, I believe most missiologists would agree that this question lies somewhere toward the central concern of missiology. Helpful discussions can be found in chapter 2 of Terry, Smith, and Anderson and in the introduction of Bosch.

²Worldview can be defined as “a conceptual scheme by which we consciously or unconsciously place or fit everything we believe and by which we interpret and judge reality” (R. H. Nash, 1992, *Worldviews in Conflict: Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*, cited in Moreau, Netland, Van Engen, and Burnett).

³“What Kind of Encounters Do We Need in Our Christian Witness?” (1991) and “Allegiance, Truth and Power Encounters in Christian Witness” (1992).

⁴Paul Hiebert talks about the cognitive dimension of worldviews as one that includes the deep assumptions about the nature of reality, the mental categories and logic, and the cognitive themes and counterthemes that underlie the culture.

⁵In chapter 7, in *Transforming Worldviews*, Paul Hiebert thoroughly describes and analyzes the modern worldview and its implications on Christianity and mission. Christianity has, in many ways, reflected the particular historical and cultural context in which it is found. “In modernity the gospel increasingly was defined in terms of abstract doctrinal truths, not everyday living. . . . Truth was to be determined by rational argument and encoded in propositional statements linked by reason. This work of experts assumed that human rationality is based on universal, transcultural, and transhistorical laws of thought. Moreover, to be objective, truth had to be separated from affectivity and morality” (2008:195).

⁶Kraft borrowed the term “power encounter,” coined by Alan Tippett, “to label the kinds of events he found were usually crucial in the South Pacific in the turning of large social groups to Christ. Since these people served gods invested with spiritual power (from Satan), it was crucial for them in considering Christianity to discover which god had the greatest power” (1996:453).

⁷Kraft calls dual allegiance “undoubtedly the biggest problem in worldwide Christianity” (1996:453).

⁸For a complete discussion on the historical development of the different positions see Morgan and Peterson.

⁹Although there are at least four suggestions by theologians as the reason for the Sadducees' annoyance—political, theological (doctrine of resurrection), traditional (fishermen were not supposed to teach), supernatural (the miraculous healing)—I chose to focus on the issues related to the question (traditional and supernatural). Apparently the Sadducees were not willing to risk a political or theological discussion in the presence of the Pharisees. See Polhill (2001:139-140) and Hendriksen and Kistemaker (146-147).

¹⁰"The last word of verse 7, *this*, likely refers to the apostles' teaching rather than the healing of the crippled beggar—both the miracle and the message might be in view" (Gangel 1998:59).

¹¹Luke uses the phrase *the name of Jesus* 33 times in the book of Acts, the first being in Acts 2:38 (Gangel 1998:60).

¹²Kraft observes that the experiential component comes into focus at revival times.

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